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Shriver Hits Politics In Justice

By John P. MacKenzie
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sargent Shriver charged yesterday that the Justice Department under President Nixon "has subverted justice by politicizing it."

As the result of mediocre appointments, political prosecutions and favoritism in law enforcement, he said, "The quality of justice in this nation under Richard Nixon is lower than at any time in modern history."

The Democratic vice presidential candidate also accused Vice President Spiro Agnew of jeopardizing the national program of legal services for the poor, a program Shriver sponsored when he headed the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Lawyers and lobbyists representing big business have ready access to the top officials of the Department (of Justice)," Shriver said, "but lawyers providing legal services for the poor are threatened and browbeaten by so high an office as the Vice President of the United States."

Shriver's speech to a law school audience in Des Moines, Iowa, compared the Justice Department's alleged favoritism toward the International Telephone and Telegraph Corp. with Agnew's hostility toward anti-poverty lawyers who go to court on behalf of the poor.

Aides to Shriver said the threats and browbeatings referred to such incidents as Agnew's intervention last year on the side of officials of Camden, N.J., who were being sued by a federally funded neighborhood law office. Agnew's involvement in a case then before the courts was criticized as unethical by officials of the American Bar Association.

"This politicization of justice is destructive. It breeds cynicism and corruption. It destroys the citizen's faith in his government. It engenders lawlessness in others," Shriver said.

He said the politicization came as no surprise, "for Nixon has chosen men of small legal stature and large political ambition to run his Department of Justice."

He contrasted the GOP Justice Department to the "men of superb ability and passionate commitment to law" who worked under Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, including Associate Justice Byron R. White and Nicholas deB. Katzenbach.

"But John Mitchell made the Department of Justice Nixon's campaign headquarters," Shriver said. "Six out of the seven top department officials were politicians, and their caliber and morals were deficient."

He cited the failure of Richard G. Kleindienst, now Attorney General, to discern and report promptly a bribe offer from a Senate staff member, and the resignation of Will Wilson as chief of the criminal division after disclosures that "he was heavily in debt to the central figure in a major Texas bank scandal."

Shriver said high department officials included "an assistant attorney general in charge of the civil division who is tied to the defendants in the Watergate burglary and bugging and is suspected of massive destruction of campaign financial records." Shriver's aides said the speech should have said "internal security division" in an intended reference to Robert C. Mardian, who is the political coordinator for the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

The candidate rapped the department for recommending "a Haynsworth and a Carswell to the Supreme Court, plus numerous others judged unqualified by the American Bar Association," but praised another Nixon appointee, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger.

Shriver said it was "gratifying" that Burger has endorsed the concept of a new institute for the improvement of justice but that it was "distressing" to him "that none of this innovation stems from the present Department of Justice."